

Personal submission to the Productivity Commission – Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans

I am the parent of recently medically discharged Defence veteran who served for 20 years. My personal submission is related to the following questions on Page 18 of the Productivity Commission Issues Paper, May 2018.

Are transition and rehabilitation services meeting the needs of veterans and their families?

- A successful transition – medical or otherwise – relies heavily on the calibre of the Commanding Officer or Chain of Command managing the individual's transition. If they have already decided the individual is a burden to them the transition will be a failure as it is the command who control the transition from the individual's unit. A successful transition should be inclusive of the individual and their family and community.
- No transitions – medical or otherwise – should occur during the months of December & January. There is little or nil support available – medical – finance – Government services, including Defence – are all in slow down or close mode for the Xmas and January holiday period.
- Transitioning during the December – January period has further repercussions the following 12 months over that same period – the 45 – 47 week period of initial payments stop and the anniversary itself can stir emotions and stress for the individual and family who may be still struggling with the 12 month anniversary.
- For those being medically discharged with mental and physical health issues it is a difficult time coping with their new civilian status as well as dealing with housing, moving, and undergoing assessments with new medical and specialist practitioners in the civilian space who have limited or nil knowledge or experience with Defence related mental health problems.
- Medical transitions should only be conducted when the individual is well enough mentally and physically to cope with the full transition phase. Individuals should be given a choice of date to transition prior to the end of financial year.
- No individual should be asked to complete Transition documentation when they are hospitalised, medicated and traumatised or about to undergo a medical and/or surgical procedure.
- Outdated transition forms need to be rewritten and laid out clearly with full and clear instructions on how to complete the form.
- Transitioning personnel should be better informed and advised about '*Statement of Reasons*', '*Held in Abeyance*' and how to accurately complete forms with guidance of sample forms and letters for the above.
 - Transitioning personnel should be given the right to choose where their long service and other payments are directed.
 - Transitioning personnel should be permitted to attend a Transition Seminar post transition.
 - Service Certificates and presentations should be personally presented to the individual at an appropriate ceremony which includes family and community, not posted to them via Australia Post.

Are veterans getting access to the services they need when they need them?

- Based on our personal family experience getting access to services is subject to a number of criteria, including having knowledge of where those services are and who are the providers of the services required. There is a minefield of information that is sent via email and text when the individual first transitions and for those who are being medically transitioned this can be extremely challenging. The DVA Rehabilitation Support that is made available can be extremely helpful however this is not guaranteed as many subsets of the rehabilitation process are contracted out to other companies and providers and can result in multiple interviews and time taken over documentation that has to be repeated. It is also challenging to have to relate information and experiences which caused the mental and physical health issues – even more challenging when it has to be repeated a number of times and to provider representatives who have no real knowledge of Defence related mental and physical injuries and conditions.
- It should also be noted here that the same information and experiences relating to mental and physical injuries also have to be submitted in document form to DVA for each claim being made. This can be extremely stressful and time consuming and most individuals require advice and assistance with this, relying on good advocacy and family support.

What could be done to improve the timeliness of transition and rehabilitation services, and the coordination of services?

- Transition dates should be the choice of the individual, prior to the end of financial year and not scheduled to suit a Defence staffing requirement calendar date.
- Families of the individual should be involved with the whole transition process in order to aid and assist the individual and understand what is needed for a successful transition. (Families may be Wife, Partner, Husband, Mother, Father, Sister, Brother, Daughter, Son, Grandparents, etc.).
- Families and communities should be involved with the transition process and I refer you Submission No. 50 from Mr Chris Moore to the 2018 “Inquiry into transition from the Australian Defence Force (ADF)” – copy attached. This document titled “A Proposal for Transitioning ADF Members back into Civilian Life with the Community: “Steps to Success (S2S) - Stepping out with Dignity Program” sets out a process for a successful transition model that incorporates families and communities and could easily and economically be adopted Australia wide.
- Currently a successful transition can be like having a lottery ticket and subject to a number of factors, including depending on the calibre of the command, which State you live in, which Service you are with, whether family support is available. The Transitioning procedures should be unified across Australia and not dependant on what State or Region the Defence member and/or family live in.

What changes could be made to make it easier for ADF personnel to transition to civilian life and to find civilian employment that matches their skills and potential?

- Many individuals who are medically discharged with mental and physical injuries are not in the right head space to find civilian employment when they first transition and it can take more than 12 months for them to be able to even contemplate working in the civilian workplace where they may need to ease back into working life with rehab support and part time hours and days. The Rehabilitation support provided via DVA cannot be underestimated and should be more widely available and known about with an increase in the support available.

- Many transitioning individuals are not receiving their accreditations or qualifications from Defence. Commands and Units who have failed to ensure their education qualifications align and are included with the associated Services (Navy, Army, Air Force) Registered Training Organisation (RTO) are falling well short of the minimum requirements for education and professional qualifications for a 'so called' employer of choice. For those with mental and physical injuries it is a minefield of information trying to follow this up with Defence and Civilian authorities. The provision of Defence Civilian Accreditation needs to be addressed and actioned urgently by Defence for all personnel who have transitioned and are due to transition. This includes provision of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPLs) and providing the professional civilian qualifications that were promised when they took on their professional roles within the ADF.

<https://www.army.gov.au/our-work/publications/our-work/publications/the-ryan-review>

<https://www.army.gov.au/our-work/publications/key-publications/professional-military-education-strategy>

- Currently the Transition Coaching Model and Services are not being provided to all individuals and is highly inconsistent and varies between each State. A solution is available as set out in the attached document "A Proposal for Transitioning ADF Members back into Civilian Life with the Community: "Steps to Success (S2S) - Stepping out with Dignity Program", proposed by Chris Moore.
- Transition (Discharge) with documentation – this so called initiative is a failure when the documentation is sent via email to an individual's ADF email address that they can no longer access. It is also a failure when documentation is sent via Australia Post in bits and pieces and/or an individual is advised that they can collect it next time they are in the area.
- The Career Transition Assistance Scheme (CTAS) is often not able to be accessed by individuals who are being medically transitioned. The time line of 12 months needs to be more flexible for those who are unwell and also for others who may be dealing with other demands of moving interstate and resettling families, etc. If the approved absence (up to 23 days) is not able to be accessed prior to transition due to mental or physical health issues, this should be made available at another time. There is no advice readily available about this after transition. If the Command refused or did not allow time for a member to access the 23 days paid absence before being medically discharged, there should be an extension of time given post transition for this to be accessed.
- Transitioning members and their families should be treated equally and fairly no matter the location, region or State that they reside in and regardless of their rank and position.
- Individuals who are mentally and physically unwell prior to and post transition should be given the opportunity to attend an ADF Transition Seminar, with a support person, anytime within the next 6-12 months. Currently individuals are being denied this in certain areas of Defence.
- Medical Transition Forums are currently only held in Brisbane and Townsville and these need to be made available for all individuals and families who are being medically transitioned and should not be restricted to only some States and Regions.
- Soldier Recovery Centres should be available in all States and Regions.
- Meaningful Engagement during rehabilitation Program – although this program was initiated in 2012 it is not clear how to access this program and has not been made available to everyone. Again if the Command is not supportive to the injured individual or the program is not available in that State or Region, the individual misses out, and therefore there is not equal opportunity for all members. There are individuals and families who are missing out.

- ADF Centre for Mental Health RESET Program – this is another program that is not widely heard of or known about. This type of information is not provided to all members across the Board so once again individuals and families are missing out.

Veterans who are medically discharged are generally in higher needs categories than people who access other rehabilitation and compensation schemes, and have exhausted options for return to work in the ADF. How should this be reflected in the design of rehabilitation services for veterans?

- For many individuals they are not given the opportunity or choice to be retrained to serve in another area or career in Defence despite their efforts to recover from their injuries. If the Command decide an individual is a burden to their Unit they will quickly get rid of them. All individuals of any rank need to be given a voice that over rides their command so that they can be heard and given professional advice, assistance and support to retrain.

How should the effectiveness of transition and rehabilitation services be measured?

- A reduction in the number of suicides in the Veteran Community.

What evidence is currently available on the effectiveness of transition and rehabilitation services? How can the service system be improved?

- I am unaware of any evidence that is currently available on the effectiveness of transition and rehabilitation service.

In some countries, rehabilitation services are provided to the families of severely injured and deceased veterans. Is there a rationale for providing such services in Australia? If so, what evidence is there on the effectiveness of these services?

- Where there is a need for families of severely injured and deceased veterans to be supported with appropriate rehabilitation services these should be made available without question. These families are in stress, their health is affected, their children are affected, as they all endeavour to cope with their loved one who is ill or who has died. These families also serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my submission.

08 February 2019.

“Steps to Success (S2S)”
Stepping out with Dignity Program

**A Proposal for Transitioning ADF Members back into
Civilian Life with the Community.**

Created and Submitted by:

Chris L Moore



“Steps to Success (S2S) - Stepping out with Dignity Program”
- Proposal by Chris L Moore

Background:

This proposal addresses and provides a solution for the transition of Defence members back into a meaningful and purposeful civilian life following their service in the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

This proposal addresses raising awareness of the need for all Defence members to be given the opportunity to walk out of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) with their head held high, feeling proud of what they have achieved during the years they have served, being given the acknowledgement which many rarely receive once their time in the ADF is complete.

A successful transition from the ADF back into the Australian local community is paramount to prevent veteran suicides and other associated problems which plague our veterans, and have a significant and direct impact on their families and loved ones who have endured with them. For too many years, former service members have been forgotten for the hardships they had to endure while serving for the ADF. The majority of the community are unaware of these hardships unless prompted on important days such as Anzac and Remembrance Day. A sense of belonging to a group with a similar cause is a common and strong attribute which service members thrive for both in service and more so outside of it. This S2S program will contribute to a successful and positive transition experience for all ADF members and their families.

When this program is implemented it will provide a positive opportunity for all Defence members to participate in a program which will be encouraging, and boost self-respect, self-esteem, dignity and meaning, and most importantly, will set every participant up for success with the support of their family and the local community, regardless of their rank, injury, illness or loss while they served.

This proposal was originally submitted to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade – Inquiry into suicide by Veterans and Ex-Service Personnel”. (Submission No. 322.), October 2016. I have subsequently made minor amendments to this document to be submitted for the Inquiry into Transition from the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

“Steps to Success (S2S) - Stepping out with Dignity Program”

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When joining the ADF all successful applicants are indoctrinated through courses before proceeding to their designated or selected field of expertise. This S2S program is a simple solution which will benefit all ADF members as they exit separate and transition from the Australian Military Forces.

All members of the ADF are taught the basics of being a Sailor, Soldier, Airman, at their various induction courses. My proposal gives our departing military members the opportunity for them to be empowered and enable them to be positively integrated back into the society and community that they initially swore to defend and protect.

My suggestion is for a course like program called ‘Steps 2 Success (S2S)’ (or ‘Stepping Out With Dignity’). It is envisaged that this would be a two week program and would be held during school holiday times at designated High Schools throughout Australia, local to significant military bases.

Individuals would not be fully discharged until they had completed this S2S program / course, as it would enable the transfer from one Government department (Defence) to another, Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) and would also enable them to be transferred into the Australian Public Service, and/or State and/or Local Government sectors.

The two week S2S program would be a series of workshops that developed and assisted individuals who are departing the ADF and would replace the 2-3 day transition seminar currently offered. The S2S program would be conducted with all members wearing civilian attire and therefore no rank classification for participants in this transition course.

The content of this two week program would include:

- All ADF paperwork to be organised and ready to be handed to the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) so that everyone is technically transferred from the Department of Defence to the DVA.
- All attendees will be given the skills on how to prepare and write their own Resume, to empower them rather than having someone else do it for them.
- Job placement / recruiting agencies looking for skilled and management military type people required for all different types of work would be in attendance to advise and interact with the participants.
- Attendees would partake in demonstrated and professional job interview skills, coaching and techniques.
- Professional Health, Nutrition and Fitness information with coaching and programs available for each individual and their family / loved ones would be on site. This would highlight the importance and benefit of fitness and health after military life. Local Gyms and Trainers would be invited to attend and offer discount services for individuals and their families.

“Steps to Success (S2S) - Stepping out with Dignity Program”
- Proposal by Chris L Moore

- The S2S program would include sessions on relaxation techniques to address potential stress and anxiety and would be combined with an interactive art experience. These interactive demonstrations and activities will help and assist individuals to achieve a new level of relaxation they may not have previously experienced.
- The S2S program will also provide an opportunity for individuals to meet with local councillors and local health providers and community support groups which provide the opportunity to put names to faces and partake in informal talks with their local health professionals.
- The provision to be personally fitted with a professionally tailored suit and/or sports jacket and trousers will enable a successful and positive transition. This service would be made available by an Australian national retailer at the S2S program, and would include style guidance and civilian dress requirements, e.g. understanding of Black Tie and other civilian related dress codes. (For many personnel transitioning from Defence after years of service and deployments, they do not have the civilian attire necessary to return to work in the civilian space.)
- Military service documentation, including Certificates and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and assistance with transition paperwork ready for finalization and simplified transition to DVA and Veteran support agencies, e.g. local Veteran Affairs Advocates, RSL, etc.
- Professional Medal Mounting service will be made available for personnel who require this to be done and ready prior to the completion of the S2S program.
- Community Area Responsibility & Engagement – CARE event: Departing ADF members meet their local community (Schools, Sporting Groups, Churches, etc) which will provide assistance and support to individuals and their family. Rather than the departing member trying to find what they need, the CARE program brings the community to them, allowing all to see what they have to offer.
- Not for Profit organisations who are seeking extra assistance of skilled and able people who are willing to make a positive contribution assisting others in the community, such as Meals on Wheels, volunteer fire fighters, State Emergency Services (SES), etc.
- Professional photography available enabling transitioning members to have a professional portrait photo taken in their military uniform for the last time, and/or a photo of them in their suit or new civilian attire for future job prospects and as memento of their military service as a family keepsake.

“Steps to Success (S2S) - Stepping out with Dignity Program”
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- Organising a final individualized departing gift or ‘presento’ which would take the form of a caricature or plaque / framed picture item that is personalised, with their previous Units, / Ships / Company / Squadrons, including their Name, Rank, or customised to what they would like. This tangible memento will be something they can keep and be proud of their time in Defence. It is expected the ADF members departing Unit would contribute towards this cost.
- The last day of the S2S program is held on a Sunday. Families / Friends / Loved ones, and the local community including the various support organisations would be invited to attend a ceremony where each individual ADF member would wear their suit and/or new civilian attire and medals. They would be individually thanked for their service and given their ‘presento’. They would then all walk off together, into the arms of their loved ones and now their local community.
- The ceremony would finish with a family BBQ and social time together before departing with their Families / Friends / Loved ones.

Welcoming our Veterans back into their community strengthens Veterans and their families including the Australian community and will build positive reinforcement and relationships for all.

I can make myself available to discuss any aspects of this submission at any time.

